

Judah During the Divided Kingdom (2 Chronicles 10:1 – 28:7)

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The Reign of Ahaz, part 2: Northern Israel's Fidelity to God (2 Chronicles 28:6-15)

Northern Israel's Fidelity to God (28:6-15)

Having already touched on the war between Ahaz and the Syrian-Israelite coalition as a demonstration of divine judgment (28:5), the Chronicler added a story focusing on one of Judah's defeats. This narrative came from the Chronicler's hand and revealed an ironic turn of events. While Ahaz had taken his nation into apostasy, northern Israelites listened to the prophet of God and humbly obeyed his instructions.

Structure of 28:6-15

The passage divides into four main parts (see figure 50). The balance of this narrative is straightforward. It begins with plunder and prisoners being taken from Judah (28:6-8). Their return forms the ending of the episode (28:14-15). The middle portion of the material consists of a prophetic rebuke (28:9-11) and the response to the rebuke (28:12-13).

Victorious Israel Takes Plunder and Prisoners (28:6-8)

Instead of reporting Israel's failed attempt to take Jerusalem (see 2 Kgs 16:5), the Chronicler wrote about Ahaz's terrible defeat. As in a number of passages, the Chronicler reported Israel and Judah in conflict. This time, however, the northern kingdom will demonstrate more righteousness than Judah (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*). Given the general characterization of Ahaz in the opening verses of his reign, it was no wonder from the Chronicler's perspective that the army of northern Israel had a great victory over him (see *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*). The Chronicler stated explicitly that Judah's defeat was **because Judah had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers** (28:6). The concept of "forsaking" appears frequently in Chronicles to describe serious violations of the covenant established between God and his people (see *Introduction: 22) Abandoning/Forsaking*). Those who forsake God are in line for God to forsake them (13:10-12; also see 12:5). On many occasions, this divine judgment against Judah resulted in defeat in battle (see

21:16-17; 22:5; 24:23-25; 28:5-8; 33:10-11; 36:6-7,9-10,15-21; see also *Introduction: 23) Victory and Defeat*).

The severity of this defeat is highlighted in several ways. 1) A **hundred and twenty thousand soldiers** in the Judahite army died at the hand of the northern Israelites **in one day** (28:6). This large number may be understood as other large numbers in Chronicles. (For the Chronicler's use of large numbers of soldiers see comments on 12:24-37.) It is clear, however, that Ahaz's defeat was astounding. 2) Certain prominent figures died in battle against the North: **the king's son ... the officer in charge of the palace ...** and the man **second to the king** (28:7). The deaths of these important people recalled the deaths of Saul and his sons (see 1 Chr 10:7). It displayed the critical nature of the defeat. 3) The Israelites also took **two hundred thousand wives, sons and daughters** (28:8). Once again, the large numbers may be understood in a number of ways, but they indicate that northern Israel's victory was tremendous. 4) The victors also **took a great deal of plunder** (28:8). Without a doubt, the Chronicler added these details to make it clear that Ahaz suffered terribly for his sins.

The relevance of this material for post-exilic Judah must not be overlooked. The returnees were troubled on all sides by potential enemies, including those living in the vicinity of northern Israel (see Ezra 4:1-5; Neh 4,6). At this point in the story, the Chronicler emphasized that Judah was not necessarily protected from northern aggression. In fact, when Judah proved unfaithful to God, God used Israel as an instrument of judgment. The same possibility held true for the post-exilic community.

Israel Receives Prophetic Rebuke (28:9-11)

The army of northern Israel returned to the capital of Samaria with captives and plunder (28:8). Along the way, however, **a prophet of the Lord named Oded** met them (28:9a). This prophet is mentioned only here. The Chronicler made it clear, however, that he was a true **prophet of the Lord** (28:9a). As in many other passages in Chronicles, the prophet presented a warning from God and the fate of those who heard was determined by their response (see *Introduction: 15) Prophets*). The prophet of God delivered a call to repentance to the Israelite army. His speech divides into the two main parts of a judgment oracle: an accusation of sin (28:9b-10) and a call to repent (28:11).

First, the prophet accused the Northerners of two sins. On the one hand, he said they went much too far in killing so many Judahites. He admitted that God gave Israel victory **because the Lord ... was angry with Judah** (28:9b; see 28:15a). Yet, the Israelites did not show appropriate restraint. They **slaughtered them in a rage that reaches to heaven** (28:9b). The expression **reaches to heaven** probably had two connotations in this context. It meant that their rage was very great and that it had gained the attention of heaven (see Ezr 9:6). The Chronicler already indicated the large numbers of Judeans who lost their lives; the prophet announced that this excess had not gone unnoticed (see Zech 1:15; Isa 10:12; 40:2).

On the other hand, the prophet's accusation focused on what the army was planning to do. Not only did they kill too many in Judah, now they intended **to make the men and women of Judah and Jerusalem ... slaves** (28:10a). Enslaving fellow Israelites was forbidden in Mosaic Law (see Lev

25:39-55; Ex 21:8; Neh 5:8). This accusation was particularly poignant in light of Northerners resistance to the labor policies of Solomon and Rehoboam (see 11:4).

Second, Oded called the northern army to repentance. He first reminded them of their own condition. They were **also guilty of sins against the Lord** (28:10b). They had no reason to feel superior to the Judahites whom they attacked. For this reason, he ordered the army, "**Send back your fellow countrymen**" (28:11; see 28:15). In a manner that fit well with the Chronicler's theology, the prophet demanded the return of the Judahite prisoners because they are **fellow countrymen** or "brothers" as the term may be translated (see NAS). This appeal to the kinship of North and South recalls prophetic words to Rehoboam as he prepared to attack the northern tribes (see 11:4). Even at this late date, the ideal of unity among all the tribes had not been forgotten by the prophet of God. He appealed to this bond as the basis for not enslaving the Judahites. Finally, the prophet warned the northern Israelite army of the danger that lies ahead for them. They must repent of their sin against Judah **for the Lord's fierce anger rests on** [them] (28:11).

The Chronicler's description of this scene touched several motifs which were particularly important to his post-exilic readers. The accusation of excess and the appeal for good treatment for the Judahites would have fit well with Judahite self-interests. Moreover, the threat of judgment against Judah's enemies would also have sounded a responsive chord.

Israel Responds to Prophetic Rebuke (28:12-13)

After the prophetic warning, **some of the leaders in Ephraim** confronted the approaching army (28:12). This third step of the story consists primarily of a speech that corresponds in several ways to the preceding prophetic speech. The leaders of Israel insisted that the prisoners not be brought to Samaria (28:13a). Having realized that they had violated the will of God by excessive force during battle (see 28:9), the leaders of Israel asked if the army intended to increase Israel's **sin and guilt** (28:13c). The leaders openly agreed with the prophet that their **guilt is already great**; they also agreed that God's **fierce anger rests on Israel** (28:13d).

This record of Israelite reaction to the prophetic warning provided a perspective on the northern tribes not found elsewhere in the Chronicler's history. Here their leaders respond appropriately to God's word. This unusual scene challenged the Chronicler's post-exilic readers to reassess their outlooks on the northern tribes (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*).

Victorious Israel Returns Plunder and Prisoners (28:14-15)

The closing step of this narrative contrasts sharply with the beginning of this story. Instead of taking plunder and captives from Judah (see 28:6-8), the northern Israelites send their Judahite captives home with the plunder.

The soldiers of Israel's army responded positively without a moment's hesitation. Apparently, all the men recognized that the prophetic word was true. More than this, the Chronicler focused on a

number of details to make it evident that the army did not merely comply with what had been ordered. They went to great lengths to show contrition and humility. They **clothed all who were naked ... provided them with clothes and sandals, food and drink and healing balm** (28:15). They also put **those who were weak on donkeys** (28:15; see 28:11). With familial language the Chronicler added that the Israelites **took their fellow countrymen** ("brothers" [NAS]) **to Jericho** (28:15; see 28:11). These acts of Israel's army exemplified extraordinary generosity and kindness. In fact, this portion of the story may have been in the background of Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (see Lk 10:30-37).

It should be noted that these extraordinary events took place in what the Chronicler called **all the assembly** (28:14). Once again, the Chronicler highlighted the importance of religious assemblies. The splendid display of humility and kindness occurred during an assembly. The importance of gathering for religious assemblies during the post-exilic period becomes evident by this extraordinary blessing (see *Introduction: 5) Religious Assemblies*).

If ever the Chronicler shocked his readers, it must have been here. In this portion of his history the Chronicler had compared the negative behavior of Judah's king with the evil kings of northern Israel (see 28:2). He also depicted the ruthless attack of Israel against Judah (see 28:5-8). But suddenly the portrait of these Israelites changed dramatically. Once they heard the word of a prophet and turned in radical repentance. This story would have given pause to any post-exilic Judahite who had excluded the possibility of repentance among the northern tribes. The Northerners were fully capable of responding to the call of the prophetic word.